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THE BAPTIST UNION CENSURE BY C. H. SPURGEON

THE censure passed upon me by the Council of the Baptist Union will be weighed by the faithful, and estimated at its true value. “Afterwards they have no more that they can do.” I brought no charges before the members of the Council, because they could only judge by their constitution, and that document lays down no doctrinal basis except the belief that “the immersion of believers is the only Christian baptism.” Even the mention of evangelical sentiments has been cut out from their printed program. No one can be heterodox under this constitution, unless he should forswear his baptism. I offered to pay the fee for Counsel’s opinion upon this matter, but my offer was not accepted by the deputation. There was, therefore, nothing for me to work upon, whatever evidence I might bring. What would be the use of exposing myself to threatened lawsuits to gain nothing at all? Whatever may be said to the contrary, if we go to its authorized declaration of principles, it is clear that the Union is incompetent for any doctrinal judgment, except it should be needful to ascertain a person’s views on baptism. I decline to submit to it any case which would be quite beyond its powers. Would any rational man act otherwise? I have rather too much proof than too little, but I am not going to involve others in litigation when nothing is to be gained.

I do not complain of the censure of the Council, or feel the least care about it. But was this the intent of its *loving* resolution? Is this the claw which was concealed by the velvet pad of its vote to send four doctors of divinity to me “to deliberate how the unity of the denomination can be maintained in truth, and love, and good works”? Did those who passed that resolution mean—we send these four men to put him to the question? Why, then, did they not say so? Did the world ever hear of such a result of a “deliberation”? The person with whom they deliberated upon union “in truth, and love, and good works” is questioned and condemned! Let plain-sailing Christian men judge between me and this Council.

The question now to be answered is—“Does this decision represent the opinion of the Baptist Union?” It may be so. It may be that the Council is elected in such a manner that it is fairly representative. It may be that the churches will admire the conduct of their prominent men. I do not believe it. It is not for me, as an outsider, to raise the question; but surely there are members of the Union who will consider it, and act accordingly.

I have, in simple brotherly kindness, given the advice which was asked of me; but had I known the secret object of the deputation from the Council, I would not have given it any advice of any sort. These gentlemen came, avowedly, to me to deliberate upon “unity in truth, and love, and good works”; but their real errand was not what was openly avowed. What they were driving at is made clear by the facts. Before considering as a Council the advice which, in any fair English construction of the words, was the object aimed at, they censure the man with whom they professed to deliberate. How is this consistent with itself? It is quite as well that their resolutions should be as incomprehensible as their doctrinal position is indefinable. But this goes far to render my recommendations useless. Is it not a waste of breath to deliberate under such circumstances? When language is used rather to conceal a purpose than to express it, it becomes fearfully doubtful whether any form of doctrine can be so worded as to be of the slightest use. Nevertheless, I would like all Christendom to know that all I asked of the Union is that it be formed on a Scriptural basis, and that I never sought to intrude upon it any Calvinistic or other personal creed,

but only that form of belief which has been accepted for many years by the Evangelical Alliance, which includes members of well-nigh all Christian communities.

To this it was replied that there is an objection to any creed whatever. This is a principle which one may fairly discuss. Surely, what we believe may be stated, may be written, may be made known, and what is this but to make and promulgate a creed? Baptists from the first have issued their confessions of faith. Even the present Baptist Union itself has a creed about baptism, though about nothing else. The churches of which it is composed have nearly all of them a creed of some sort, and the very men who object to a creed many of them hold offices which require adhesion to certain doctrines, implied, if not actually written down. Trust-deeds of chapels and colleges usually have some doctrinal declaration, and how persons who hold positions connected with churches and institutions having creeds can fairly object to them when they meet in a united character, I am quite unable to see. Certain members of the Council talk about having expelled Unitarians; does not this admit that they have already an unwritten Trinitarian creed? Why not print it? Possibly "modern thought" has methods of getting over this which have never occurred to my unsophisticated mind.

To say that "a creed comes between a man and his God," is to suppose that it is not true; for truth, however definitely stated, does not divide the believer from his Lord. So far as I am concerned, that which I believe I am not ashamed to state in the plainest possible language, and the truth I hold I embrace because I believe it to be the mind of God revealed in His infallible Word. How can it divide me from God who revealed it? It is one means of my communion with my Lord, that I receive His words as well as Himself, and submit my understanding to what I see to be taught by Him. Say what He may, I accept it because He says it, and therein pay Him the humble worship of my inmost soul.

I am unable to sympathize with a man who says he has no creed, because I believe him to be in the wrong by his own showing. He ought to have a creed. What is equally certain, he has a creed—he must have one, even though he repudiates the notion. His very unbelief is, in a sense, a creed.

The objection to a creed is a very pleasant way of concealing objection to discipline, and a desire for latitudinarianism. What is wished for is a Union which will, like Noah's Ark, afford shelter both for the clean and for the unclean, for creeping things and winged fowls.

Every Union, unless it is a mere fiction, must be based upon certain principles. How can we unite except upon some great common truths? And the doctrine of baptism by immersion is not sufficient for a groundwork. Surely, to be a Baptist is not everything. If I disagree with a man on ninety-nine points, but happen to be one with him in baptism, this can never furnish such ground of unity as I have with another with whom I believe in ninety-nine points, and only happen to differ upon one ordinance. To form a union with a single Scriptural ordinance as its sole distinctive reason for existence has been well likened to erecting a pyramid upon its apex; the whole edifice must sooner or later come down. I am not slow to avow my conviction that the immersion of believers is the baptism of Holy Scripture, but there are other truths beside this, and I cannot have fellowship with a man because of this, if in other matters he is false to the teaching of Holy Scripture.

To alter the foundation of a building is a difficult undertaking. Underpinning is expensive and perilous work. It might be more satisfactory to take the whole house down, and reconstruct it. If I had believed that the Baptist Union could be made a satisfactory structure, I could not then have remained in it; because to do so would have violated my conscience. But *my* conscience is no guide for others. Those who believe in the structure, and think that they can rectify its foundation, have my hearty sympathy in the attempt. Let them give themselves to it earnestly and with firm resolve; they will have need of all their earnestness and resolution. In the Assembly, in the Associations, and in the churches they can urge their views, and make it plain that they mean to make the Union an avowedly Evangelical body on the old lines of faith. This they must do boldly, and without flinching. I have no very assured hope of their success, for the difficulties are exceedingly great; but let them combine, and work unitedly, and persistently, year after year, and they may do something, if not everything. It is not for me to lead in a work which I have been forced to abandon; but there are other men who are less known, but not less resolute,

and these should take their turn. The warfare has been made too personal and certain incidents in it, upon which I will not dwell, have made it too painful for me to feel any pleasure in the idea of going on with it. It might even appear that I desired to be reinstated in the Union, or wished to head a party in it, and this is very far from my mind. But let no man imagine that I shall cease from my protests against false doctrine, or lay down the sword of which I have thrown away the scabbard. However much invited to do so, I shall not commence personalities, nor disclose the wretched facts in all their details, but with confirmatory evidence perpetually pouring in upon me, and a solemn conviction that the dark conspiracy to overthrow the truth must be dragged to light, I shall not cease to expose doctrinal declension wherever I see it. With the Baptist Union, as such, I have now no hampering connection, but so far as it takes its part in the common departure from the truth, it will have to put up with my strictures, although it has so graciously kicked me under pretext of deliberation.

Will those who are with me in this struggle remember me in their constant prayers to the Lord, whom in this matter I serve in my soul and spirit?

(From THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL Magazine, February, 1888).

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